

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 EA-11 ISO-00 ACDA-19 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 IO-14 SAJ-01 DRC-01 /147 W

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R 210922Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0599

INFO AMMBASSY CANBERRA 0751

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

CINCPAC

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 2217

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, SN

SUBJ: UK DEFENSE CONSULTATIONS WITH SINGAPORE

REF: SINGAPORE 2099 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTE

LEE TOLD VISITING UK

MINISTER OF STATE FOR

DEFENSE RODGERS THAT HE

HOPED UK WOULD RETAIN MILITARY FORCES IN SINGAPORE

TO MAINTAIN ITS HISTORIC ROLE IN THE AREA FOR

A WHILE LONGE

. LEE STRESSED THAT THESE FORCES

WERE IMPORTANT FOR THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUE, AND

THAT THEY MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE

STABILITY OF THE AREA. RODGERS STRESSED THAT HE

WAS ON A FACT-FIND NG MISSION AND THAT NO DECISION

HAD BEEN TAKEN. ALTHOUGH HE INDICATED

HE WAS

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PERSONALLY PERSUADED OF THE DESIRABILITY

OF
RETAINING FORCES IN SINGAPORE, PROBLEM WAS
FINDING MONEY TO PAY FOR THEM. ACTING UK HIGH
COMMISSIONER ADVISED EMBASSY THAT IF US URGED
SECRETARY FOR DEFENSE MASON (WHO WILL VISIT
WASHINGTON NEXT MONTH) TO KEEP UK FORCES
IN SINGAPORE, THIS WOULD HAVE CONSIDERABLE EFFECT
ON FINAL DECISION. END SUMMARY.

1. ACTING UK HIGH COMMISSIONER WATTS INFORMED DCM
MAY 21 THAT MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENSE RODGERS'
DISCUSSIONS ON MAY 17 WITH LEE AND GOH HAD BEEN MOST
HELPFUL. HE MET SEPARATELY WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE
GOH AND PRIME MINISTER LEE AND BOTH SAID THEY HOPED
UK WOULD RETAIN MILITARY FORCES IN SINGAPORE TO MAINTAIN
ITS "HISTORIC ROLE" IN THE AREA A WHILE LONGER.
ACCORDING TO WATTS, LEE POINTED OUT THAT UK FORCES
WERE MUCH MORE IMPORTANT FOR THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL THAN
THEIR MILITARY VALUE. HE STRESSED THAT THEY MADE A
CONTRIBUTION TO THE STABILITY OF THE AREA WHICH IT WOULD
BE DIFFICULT FOR OTHERS TO PROVIDE. WATTS INTERPRETED
THIS AS MEANING THAT SINCE UK WAS NO LONGER A MAJOR
POWER AND NOT A THREAT TO ANYONE AND BRITISH FORCES
HAD BEEN STATIONED IN THE AREA FOR SUCH A LONG TIME,
RETENTION OF THESE FORCES IN SINGAPORE WOULD BE A
STABILIZING RATHER THAN AN UPSETTING FACTOR IN THE
REGION. LEE POINTED OUT THAT ASEAN NEEDED TIME TO
DEVELOP AND THAT THE NEXT FEW YEARS WOULD PRESENT A
NUMBER OF "UNCERTAINTIES" INCLUDING THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF RELATIONS WITH A CERTAIN MAJOR POWER. THEREFORE,
HE DID NOT WANT ANY VACUUMS CREATED AND FELT IT WOULD
BE HELPFUL FOR BRITISH FORCES TO STAY.

2. DR. GOH COMMENTED TO RODGERS THAT SINGAPORE COULD
NOT NECESSARILY ASSUME THAT ITS IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS WOULD
ALWAYS BE GOVERNED BY RATIONAL MEN, AND THAT THE
PRESENCE OF BRITISH FORCES WOULD PROVIDE A DETERRENT
AGAINST POSSIBLE FUTURE EXTERNAL PRESSURES. BOTH LEE
AND GOH HAMMERED AWAY AT THE GROWING SOVIET "THREAT"
AND IMPLIED THAT SINGAPORE VIEWED THE CONTINUING PRESENCE
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OF UK AND OTHER COMMONWEALTH FORCES AS A REASSURING
BUFFER BETWEEN POSSIBLE SINO/SOVIET AND SOVIET/AMERICAN
COMPETITIVE PRESSURES.

3. RODGERS
INFORMED THEM THAT UK WAS CURRENTLY ENGAGED
IN A WORLD-WIDE REVIEW OF DEFENSE COMMITMENTS AND
FORCES, AND THAT HE WAS ON A FACT-FINDING MISSION

WHICH WOULD BE USEFUL IN REACHING FINAL DECISIONS. HE STRESSED THAT IT WAS NOT A FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT UK FORCES WOULD BE WITHDRAWN. RODGERS TRIED TO DRAW OUT BOTH LEE AND GOH AS TO WHICH FORCES THE GOS WOULD PREFER TO REMAIN AND WHICH COULD BE THE MORE EASILY SACRIFICED. FOR EXAMPLE, DID GOS PREFER RETENTION UK AIR AND NAVAL PRESENCE OR UK BATTALION? ALTHOUGH BOTH INDICATED THAT OOS WOULD APPRECIATE UK RETAINING IN SINGAPORE AS MANY FORCES AS POSSIBLE, THEY REFUSED TO BE DRAWN OUT ON NUMBERS OR PARTICULAR UNITS. LEE SAID IMPORTANT THING WAS TO HAVE A UK MILITARY FORCE PHYSICALLY PRESENT IN SINGAPORE AND THAT ITS ACTUAL COMPOSITION WAS OF LESS SIGNIFICANCE.

4. RODGERS TOLD THEM THAT HE WAS PERSONALLY CONVINCED BY THEIR ARGUMENTS OF THE DESIRABILITY OF KEEPING UK FORCES IN SINGAPORE, BUT THAT SINCE THEIR JUSTIFICATION WAS MORE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL THAN MILITARY, THE GOS OUGHT TO COMMUNICATE ITS VIEWS TO FOREIGN SECRETARY CALLAGHAN AND TO THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER, MR. HEALEY. HE NOTED THAT EVEN THOUGH EVERYONE MIGHT AGREE THAT IT WAS DESIRABLE TO KEEP UK FORCES IN SINGAPORE THE PROBLEM WOULD BE TO FIND THE MONEY TO PAY FOR THEM. RODGERS INDICATED THAT THE UK MIGHT DISCUSS THE FINANCING PROBLEM WITH AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, AND ITS NATO ALLIES.

5. ACCORDING WATTS, INDONESIAN EMBASSY MINISTER ASWISMARMO APPROACHED RODGERS AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION AND SAID INDONESIA ALSO HOPED BRITISH FORCES WOULD REMAIN IN SINGAPORE AND INDICATED THAT JAKARTA WAS CONCERNED OVER FUTURE PRC INFLUENCE IN MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE
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AND THOUGH THAT BRITISH FORCES WOULD HELP PRESERVE THE STABILITY OF THE REGION. (ALTHOUGH WATTS DID NOT KNOW WHETHER ASWISMARMO WAS SPEAKING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS IT SEEMS UNLIKELY HE WOULD SAY THIS IF HE DID NOT THINK IT ACCORDED WITH THE PREVAILING VIEWPOINT IN JAKARTA.)

6. WATTS WAS CONVINCED THAT GOS AND GOM HAD COORDINATED AT HIGH LEVEL TO URGE UK TO RETAIN FORCES IN SINGAPORE. HE INDICATED THAT HE HAD HEARD FROM KUALA LUMPUR THAT THE GOM HAD HINTED TO RODGERS THAT THE UK MILITARY PRESENCE HAD A "GOOD EFFECT" UPON SINGAPORE AND FEARED THAT IF THE FIVE POWER DEFENSE ARRANGEMENT COLLAPSED, SINGAPORE MIGHT EVENTUALLY LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR ASSISTANCE.

7. WATTS SAID SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MASON WOULD
PROBABLY VISIT WASHINGTON NEXT MONTH TO SEEK US VIEWS
ON ITS OVERSEAS COMMITMENTS. HE FELT THAT IF US
URGED UK TO RETAIN MILITARY FORCES IN SINGAPORE, IT
WOULD HAVE CONSIDERABLE EFFECT. AS RESULT OF RODGERS
VISIT, WATTS THOUGH THERE WAS A BETTER CHANCE THAT UK
WOULD KEEP SOME NAVAL AND AIR PRESENCE IN SINGAPORE,
BUT THOUGHT IT WAS STILL LIKELY THE ARMY BATTALION WOULD
REMAIN.
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